

THE UNITED STATES ARMY CHAPLAINS SCHOOL

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

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CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION.	1
II. ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM	3
High divorce rate; unhappiness in existing marriages; young people disillusioned with marriage; reasons for marriage failure; results of unhappy marriages; challenge to Chaplains and religious leaders.	
III. MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT MOVEMENT.	8
Basic philosophy; goals of marriage enrichment; formats for marriage enrichment programs; special dynamics in couples groups; leadership; functions of the leader couple; lessons from group marriage counseling; stages of group development; organized marriage enrichment programs.	
IV. MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT IN THE MILITARY SETTING.	18
Special pressures on the military family; marriage enrichment introduced through the Chapel Program; family life conference; marriage growth groups, couple selection; Fort Wainawright experience; introducing an organized marriage enrichment move- ment; response to marriage enrichment.	
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	20
Note: Writing Style Guide - A Manual for Writers by Kate L. Turabian.	

Marriage Enrichment

I. Introduction

Chaplains are deeply concerned about the welfare of the institution of marriage in our society. The happiness of men, women and children is directly linked to their experiences with marriage, their own or that of their parents. As a religious leader the Chaplain sees marriage as an institution ordained by God for the good of mankind. He performs marriages. He ministers to married people and their children.

One of the most paradoxical phenomena of our time is the extremely high failure rate of marriages at the same time when more people than ever in our history are marrying. It is obvious that there are serious problems with marriage as it is experienced in our society. It is equally apparent that great numbers of people are seeking to satisfy certain basic needs by entering the marriage relationship. They begin the relationship with high expectations and hope but are frequently disillusioned and disappointed. Some maintain the marriage inspite of their dissatisfactions. An increasing number are chosing to dissolve the marriage with this person and try again with someone else.

The response of religious leaders to this problem has been more reactive than proactive. Chaplains and ministers have called the publics' attention to the importance of marriage and the family. They have warned of the tragedy of divorce to individual persons and to the society. They have offered their services as pastoral counselors to peoples whose marriages were in trouble. They have endeavored to reorient and rehabilitate the children of broken homes. These activities are most worthy and in great demand. The time of these pastors is so

taken by reaction to these problems that little time is left to devote to prevention.

The challenging task of assisting people to avoid unhappiness in marriage involves three tasks. First the existing situation must be analyzed; second, a sound program of marriage preparation must be established; and third, an ongoing program for marriage enrichment must be developed and disseminated.

This paper will deal primarily with an analysis of the present situation and the development and dissemination of Marriage Enrichment Programs.

II. Analysis of the Problem

There is no question that the institution of marriage is in trouble today. Several symptoms of marital distress are evident in our society.

The most obvious indicator of difficulty in marriage is the high divorce rate. During 1970 in California for every 100 couples who were married there were 66 who were permanently parting by way of divorce.¹ The divorce rates vary in different sections of the country but are increasing at alarming rates. Even seasoned marriages are ending in divorce. Jurate Kazickas in a syndicated article in Associated Press News Papers, 8 March 1973, described the sharp increase in divorce among people who had been married for several years. She indicated that more than 25 per cent of all divorces filed today involve marriage of more than 15 years compared with 4 percent 30 years ago, according to the Census Bureau.

High as the divorce rate is, there are many social scientists who believe that the degree of unhappiness in existing marriages is even higher. Nena and George O'Neill say "Married bliss now seems a mirage further beyond our grasp. Nearly one in three marriages ends in divorce, and some researchers contend that at least 75 per cent of our marriages are ailing".² Dr. David Mace estimates that not over 10% of the lasting marriages are really happy. "Most couples achieve no significant growth toward in-depth relationships; not because they don't desire it but because the way to intimacy is blocked by inevitable conflict, and our

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1. Carl R. Rogers, Becoming Partners (New York: Dell Publishing Co. Inc. 1972) pp. 9, 10.
 2. Nena O'Neill and George O'Neill, Open Marriage (New York: M Evans and Co. 1972) pp. 16.

culture does not yet train people in what we call interpersonal competence."³

Young people are disillusioned with marriage as they see it experienced and are looking for other viable alternatives. Carl Rogers points out, "In my contacts with young people it has become clear to me, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the contemporary young person tends to have a distrust of marriage as an institution. He has seen too many flaws in it. He has often seen it fail in his own home."⁴ Dr. Rogers goes on in his book Becoming Partners to describe some of the alternatives that young people have substituted for marriage.

The causes of marriage failure in our society are numerous and complex. Every marriage is unique and the reasons for failure are never identical. Some causes reoccur so frequently that generalizations about causal factors can be made. David and Vera Mace in We Can Have Better Marriages If We Really Want Them suggest the following:

1. External pressures that once held marriages together are sharply reduced.
2. Male - female role confusion leads to conflict.
3. The transition from the old authoritarian marriages to the newer companionship marriages is difficult.
4. Many people entering marriage have unrealistic expectations of the relationship.
5. The speed, mobility, and complexity of our culture puts excessive

3. David Mace and Vera Mace, "The Case for Marriage Enrichment" ACME newsletter April, 1974 pp. 6.

4. Rogers, Becoming Partners pp. 10.

pressure on marital ties.

6. The Women's Liberation Movement is fragmenting couples.
7. Marriage is under severe literary attack as an outmoded institution.⁵

The major reasons for marriage failure according to Nena and George

O'Neill are:

1. Rigid role expectations.
2. Partner ownership.
3. Poor communication.
4. Lack of respect for partners as persons.⁶

Whatever the causes, it is the result of marital disintegration that most concern religious and social leaders. Marriage is the social instrument for meeting mans basic physical drives for pair bonding, sexual expression, and procreation.⁷ When these basic drives cannot find positive satisfying expression they trigger disruptive, destructive behavior. People get hurt when marriages fail.

Marriage should be an opportunity for individual growth and fulfillment on the part of each spouse. Herbert Otto says "Marriage is essentially an ongoing encounter with growth. We can grow as individuals throughout our lives if we desire, and marriage can be a relationship that will facilitate the growth of both husband and wife."⁸ It is tragic that so few of the people getting married capitalize on this opportunity for growth and fulfillment.

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5. David Mace and Vera Mace, We Can Have Better Marriages (New York: Abingdon Press 1974) pp. 119.
 6. O'Neill, Open Marriage
 7. Desmond Morris, The Human Zoo (New York: McGraw-Hill 1969) pp. 83-84.
 8. Herbert Otto, More Joy in Your Marriage (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc.) pp. ix.

The people who suffer most as a result of unhappy marriages are the children of these unions. It is in the home that the child develops his self image, his view of life, and his ability to relate to others. The family is the workshop of relationships. It is here that the child learns to trust people and himself. Clinebell identifies the will to relate as the most powerful of human strivings.⁹ "This hunger is a part of being human with deep roots in man's long infancy and childhood. Personality is formed and deformed in relationship; a person needs others in order to be a person."¹⁰ The child of an unhappy marriage is victimized by his parents. He may be neglected because they expend all their energy in conflict with each other. He may be blamed for the marital difficulty or he may be used by one parent as a weapon against the other. If the marriage breaks up he is deprived of a person important to his emotional development. A very high percentage of the criminals, addicts and other social deviants in our society has come from broken homes.

The problems of marriage have not been ignored. Many well trained professional people have directed their expertise to helping people with these difficulties. Clergymen, psychiatrists, psychologists, lawyers, social workers and doctors have all made their contributions. The demand for marriage counseling has been so great in recent years that a whole new inter-disciplinary specialist has emerged, the marriage counselor.

In spite of all this, the demand for marriage counseling far exceeds the counselors available. Present counseling is only dealing with the

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9. Howard J. Clinebell, The People Dynamic (New York: Harper & Row 1972) pp.13.
 10. Charlotte Clinebell and Howard Clinebell, The Intimate Marriage, (New York: Harper & Row 1972) pp. 12.

visible tip of the iceberg. Beneath the surface are hoards of marriages blighted by boredom, emotional isolation, sexual frustration and other problems inherent in poor relationships. These people want something better for themselves and for their children.

This need poses a tremendous challenge to chaplains and other religious leaders. There are two basic approaches to this problem. The first is to provide a more adequate preparation for marriage to all couples. A great deal of creative work is being done in this area. The second approach is that of marriage enrichment. This entails the development of programs designed to enable married people to discover the potential for greater happiness and fulfillment within their own marriage.

The remainder of this paper is devoted to a study of the Marriage Enrichment Movement. The philosophy, goals, dynamics and real life expressions of the movement will be considered. A final consideration will be its possible application to the military setting.

III. Marriage Enrichment Movement

The degree of agreement on basic philosophy between the various expressions of the marriage enrichment movement is truly amazing. It transcends national regional and even religious denominational differences.

There are at least three fundamental areas of agreement.

First, the thrust of the movement is preventative rather than remedial. Dr. Frances L. Beatman suggests that family service agencies should place their preventive responsibility on a par with their treatment responsibilities. "The need for preventive work by social institutions, particularly those that are committed to serving the family, is becoming increasingly clear."¹¹

The organized approaches to marriage enrichment all emphasize that their programs are designed to make good marriages better. Couples with obvious marital difficulties are encouraged to seek professional marriage counseling. In the introduction to the Clinebell's book Intimate Marriage they say, "A couple with a crippled or disintegrating marriage needs a marital therapy group not a marital growth group. The leaders in the Marriage Encounter movement make the same affirmation. "In all the promotion efforts made to spread the Marriage Encounter, a stress is put on one prerequisite - the couple must have a good marriage to start with. This movement is not for marriages which are in trouble,and is not set up as a professional vehicle for counseling."¹²

Second, the orientation of marriage enrichment programs is toward

11. Mace, We Can Have Better Marriages.

12. Antoinette Bosco, Marriage Encounter (St. Meinard, Indiana: Abbey Press, 1972) pp. 64.

growth and development of the highest potentials both in the individuals and in the relationship itself. "We believe that most people have a latent capacity and a desperate need to give and receive love. Often this capacity has been inhibited and restrained in our culture."¹³ Marriage growth groups are designed to free up and actualize that potential. Clinebell says, "These groups offer a workable method by which 'normal' people can break out of their boxes, discover unused strengths and deepen their intimate relationships In the small, sharing group lies the power which enables persons to live more fully and live more creatively."¹⁴ Antoinette Bosco says something similar about Marriage Encounter: "In analyzing why Marriage Encounter works, an obvious statement must be made. It works because it offers something valid --- a technique for communicating, so simple that it could be compared to turning a key in a lock Through the dialogues, the Marriage Encounter unlocks hidden and unspoken feelings between husband and wife, releasing a realization of how much each means to the other."¹⁵

Third, the approach to marriage enrichment should be dynamic rather than didactic. Some didactic efforts have been made in college courses, marriage preparation classes and other instructional programs. These programs help but do not go deep enough. Intellectual information often has little effect on attitudes and emotional reactions. A dynamic program involving direct interpersonal interaction will prepare couples to deal more effectively with the real interaction within their marriage.¹⁶

13. Mace, We Can Have Better Marriages.

14. Howard J. Clinebell, The People Dynamic (New York: Harper & Row 1972) pp. vii, viii.

15. Bosco, Marriage Encounter.

16. Mace, We Can Have Better Marriages.

"One application of behavioral science to the possible improvement of marriages is the encounter laboratory for couples. As an educational innovation specifically designed to increase interpersonal competence, the laboratory method seems ideal for aiding the marital relationship."¹⁷ Most marriage enrichment groups use a modified form of the encounter lab.

While the specific goals of marriage enrichment programs differ somewhat in general their goals have many themes in common. Compare the following representative goal statements.

Richard Pider in his chapter on "Encounter Groups for Married Couples" (New Perspectives on Encounter Groups) suggests for goals:

1. Greater congruence in the relationship, eliminating facades, pretense, and role distorted behavior.
2. Clearer understanding of relationship patterns.
3. An increased openness to and acceptance of the full range of feelings within the relationship.
4. Greater realism regarding the relationship; working through unrealistic expectations.

Howard Clinebell in the books Intimate Marriage and The People Dynamic offers these goals for marriage growth groups:

1. Help couples cope with marital "future shock" by enabling them to achieve more of the adventure of self-discovery, personal growth, unfoldment, and fulfillment in their marriage.
2. Deal frankly with the longing of couples for more mutual pleasuring in their sex life.
3. Teach couples to handle conflict creatively.

17. L. N. Solomon, (ed.) New Perspectives on Encounter Groups (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc. 1972) pp. 304.

4. Help marriages become an ongoing two-person growth group.

David and Vera Mace in their book *Better Marriages* see the goals as:

1. Developing a new awareness of the growth potential in marriage-- experiencing marriage as a dynamic process rather than a static situation.
2. Discovery that many couples have similar difficulties.
3. Clearing away some obstacles to growth.
4. Developing a sense of vocation to help others with their marriage.

Marriage enrichment programs have been presented in several different formats. There are advantages and disadvantages with each. "What is important in any format, is that it provide sufficient frequency, intensity, and continuity of experience together so that the psychological process of becoming a group will operate."¹⁸

One of the most widely used formats is that of the concentrated weekend retreat. This would usually begin Friday evening and end Sunday afternoon or evening. This has proven quite effective with its greatest weakness being lack of continuity and follow-up.

Another option is the one day marathon. This is usually a concentrated experience of from 12 to 18 hours. It is considered by most leaders as less effective than the weekend retreat with the same disadvantages.

Several types of on-going groups have been employed. Some have met weekly for one and a half to two hours. Some have a three to six hour meeting every other week. Others have an all day meeting once a month. The on-going group has the problem of maintaining a feeling of "groupness". Some time is lost reestablishing the group at each meeting.

18. Clinebell, The People Dynamic pp. 18.

It has the advantage of continuity in which growth can be observed by group members and fed back to individual participants.

The best format for a marriage enrichment program would involve one or more concentrated experiences (retreat or marathon) along with an on-going group experience.

There are special dynamics which become apparent in couples groups. Leaders working in marriage enrichment would do well to be aware of these.

Couples are able to get group process operational more quickly than unrelated individuals. "Married couples come to the laboratory with established personal intimacy and much interpersonal data. If the focus of the laboratory is kept on the relationship, the intimacy and data act as levers to rapidly bring about trust at an intimate level."¹⁹

Couples bring an established behavior pattern to the group which are quickly identified by the group.²⁰

Couples form an ongoing unit, a two-person group, in which they can continue to facilitate the growth process in each that started in the group.²¹

There is a strong initial resistance on the part of couples to share with other couples what is happening in their own marriage. David and Vera Mace observed in their groups that "the deeper the level at which we invited them to share their experience, the stronger the resistance became. It seemed to us that the resistance was stronger and better organized

19. L. N. Solomon (ed.), New Perspectives on Encounter Groups (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc. 1972) pp. 304.

20. Ibid. pp. 308.

21. Ibid.

than the natural reticence of an individual to make disclosures to strangers."²² They call this a cultural taboo, the "intermarital taboo".

Once couples in the group have overcome this barrier, they rapidly identify with one another and eagerly share experiences. They often feel closer to one another after only a few hours together, than they do to other couples they have known for most of their married lives.²³

Termination is not the problem for couples groups that it is for individuals. "As they end the group experience and return home, they do not suffer the loneliness which individual participants leaving an encounter group pass through. They go back as a social unit, to continue at home the process of enrichment which they have already begun."²⁴

Leadership is a vital factor in any marriage enrichment program. Organized approaches to marriage enrichment provide special training for leaders.

Experience has shown that there are significant advantages in having a married couple serve as leaders. They constitute a subgroup in a group of subgroups, so that identification is easy and natural in both directions. The leaders serve as models of growing persons continuing to develop a growing relationship. The leader couple become a surrogate extended family for group participants providing both mother and father figures.²⁵

23. Mace, We Can Have Better Marriages pp. 128.

24. Ibid. pp. 129.

25. Ibid. pp. 134.

The leader couple performs several needed functions for the marriage growth group. They will usually organize the group and arrange for its first meeting. They will facilitate the development of group identity through significant relating and sharing. They foster group centeredness by not playing "expert" and by encouraging participation. The leader couple demonstrate growth-awakening relating. A growth orientation is caught by group members more than being taught. The leaders should be as self-revealing, caring, and trustful of the group as they would want the other members to become. The attention of the group needs to be focused on the "here and now" and the possibilities of the future rather than brooding over the problems of the past. The leader couple can give each other continuing evaluative feedback and compare their perceptions of group interaction.²⁶

Some lessons learned in group marriage counseling may be helpful to leaders of marriage enrichment groups. Group goals should be clearly delineated at the start and reiterated throughout the groups existence. Activities or discussions superfluous to the group goals should be avoided. Terminology and concepts employed in group sessions should be clearly defined and understood by all group members. Major concepts, communication skills or problem solving techniques should be repeated often enough to assure that group members have a working knowledge of them. Direct transformation of knowledge into behavior change should be encouraged in every way possible. Group leaders should work diligently to keep communication as simple and direct as possible. Finally, it is important to the success

26. Clinebell, The People Dynamic , pp. 39, 40.

of any group that the leader guide the group in ongoing assessment of the degree to which the group is attaining its goals.²⁷

Marriage growth groups in whatever format they are organized will usually progress through certain distinct developmental stages. Good leaders will be sensitive to these stages of group growth and use them creatively. They may not always occur in the sequential order listed below but often do.

1. The individually centered, competitive stage is marked by attempts to establish a leadership hierarchy or "pecking order".
2. The "honeymoon" stage is predominantly one of warm positive feelings where conflict is avoided.
3. In the frustration, conflict stage, negative feelings surface testing the group acceptance of open honest expression.
4. The "risking-trusting" stage emerges when some members open up sharing their disappointments, pain, and hopes for a better life. As they experience group support and acceptance, others find the courage to share themselves more openly.
5. In the effective growth stage members help one another achieve individual and couple growth goals. Couples will often report significant changes in their family life between group meetings.
6. "Closing" is a difficult stage. Terminating a group should be a gradual growth producing process. The leaders should remind the group of its approaching end so that slower group members will have opportunity to get at their growth work before the

27. (Adapted from) "A Structured Approach to Group Marriage Counseling", Mental Hygiene Jan. 1971 pp. 77-78.

actual termination.^{28, 29}

The marriage enrichment movement is embodied in several formal organized programs. A brief description of representative programs follows.

The best organized and fastest growing movement is Marriage Encounter. This is an international religious program of weekend retreats in which husbands and wives are guided in an encounter with each other and with God. The focus is on communication and spiritual growth. In the New York area there is an active follow up effort after the Encounter weekend. The movement is basically Roman Catholic but people of other faiths may participate in the Encounter if they so desire. The movement is clearly described and analyzed in the book Marriage Encounter by Antoinette Bosco.³⁰

A booklet Marriage Enrichment Retreats: Story of a Quaker Project by David and Vera Mace describes this Quaker program. It follows the weekend retreat format combining group sharing and private encounter between husband and wife. The thrust is toward realizing the growth potential within the marriage.

Marriage Communication Labs is a program of the United Methodist Church. As its name indicates it focuses on communication. The movement lacks dynamic leadership and is not well organized. Information on this program is available from Ministries in Marriage, The United Methodist Church, P. O. Box 871, Nashville, Tenn. 37202.

The United Church of Canada has developed a marriage enrichment program managed through its division on Family Ministries, 7th Floor, 85 St. Cleur Avenue, East Toronto, Canada M4T1L8.

28. Paul Popenoe (ed.) Techniques of Marriage and Family Counseling (Vd 2) American Institute of Family Relations. Los Angeles 1973 pp. 12.

29. Clinebell, The People Dynamic, pp. 31.

30. Antoinette Bosco, "A Face to Face Weekend" US Catholic August 1972 pp. 35.

The Association of Couples for Marriage Enrichment is a national organization which is not directly associated with a religious body. This organization aims to have member couples commit themselves to four principles:

1. To seek together to become equal partners in a loving, sharing and mutually creative relationship.
2. To join other ACME couples in activities and experiences designed to promote mutual growth and enrichment.
3. To help provide and promote effective services to help people with marital problems.
4. To work to improve the public image of marriage as a relationship capable of fostering both personal growth and mutual fulfillment.

ACME sponsors marriage enrichment retreats, marriage marathons and ongoing marriage growth groups. The ACME program goes beyond assistance to couples to a broader concern for the life of the community.

A detailed description of ACME is found in chapter 20 of David and Vera Mace's book Better Marriages.³¹

III. Marriage Enrichment in a Military Setting

The problem of marriage failure and unhappy marriages is at least as great in the military as it is in civilian life. Military marriages are complicated by several factors. Husbands are sent on isolation tours being separated from their families for a year or more. Military families move more frequently than their civilian counterparts. Military families live for long periods of time in foreign countries, great distances from their homes. These factors promote a feeling of rootlessness that places an added strain on the husband-wife relationship.

In my opinion the marriage enrichment movement can best be introduced to the military community through the Chaplains and the Chapel program. Chaplains are recognized community leaders and by the nature of their profession and training are authorities on marriage and marriage counseling.

A well planned family life conference is a good vehicle to stimulate interest in marriage enrichment. A competent inspirational leader can open people's eyes to the better life available to those who really want it. A successful program of this sort can lead to the organization of marriage growth groups under the leadership of local couples.

The guidelines suggested in this paper would be helpful to leaders establishing marriage growth groups. Experience has shown that one of the better formats in the military situation is the ongoing group meeting every other week. This can be supplemented by one day marathons or weekend retreats. Most chaplains and their wives, with a minimum of training, could qualify as leader couples for marriage enrichment groups.

Couple selection for marriage growth groups in the military community can be a special problem. It is not advisable to mix officers and enlisted

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personnel especially if they are assigned to the same unit. It is even problematic to mix officers from the same unit if they are in a position to supervise one another.

The marriage enrichment movement was introduced to Fort Wainwright, Alaska in the fall of 1971 in the manner just described. In the spring of 1974 there were four ongoing marriage growth groups in operation. Thus, demonstrating the growing interest of the military families of that installation in developing better happier marriages. During this period numerous couples expressed appreciation for the growth that had occurred in them as individuals and in their marriage because of their participation in a marriage growth group.

Another way for Chaplains to promote the marriage enrichment movement in the military community is to encourage couples to participate in civilian programs such as Marriage Encounter or Marriage Communications Labs. Follow-up growth groups could consolidate lessons learned in these experiences.

Experience has confirmed that large numbers of military couples have a sincere desire to improve the quality of their married life. Chaplains have a moral obligation to respond to that desire in as creative a manner as possible within the local situation.